United Nations A/58/PV.58

General Assembly
Fifty-eighth session

Official Records

58th plenary meeting
Thursday, 6 November 2003, 11.30 a.m.
New York

President: The Hon. Julian R. Hunte ..... (Saint Lucia)

The meeting was called to order at 11.35 a.m.

Agenda item 22 (*continued*)

Assistance in mine action

Report of the Secretary-General (A/58/260 and Add.1)

Mr. Drobnjak (Croatia): At the outset, allow me to commend the Secretary-General's report (A/58/260) on assistance in mine action, which constitutes an important element of a more systematic and coordinated approach to the subject. We also welcome the outcome of the fifth Meeting of the States Parties to the Ottawa Convention, which was held in September in Bangkok and which reaffirmed an unwavering commitment to the total eradication of anti-personnel mines and to overcoming the insidious and inhumane effects of those deadly weapons.

Croatia's statement will be circulated in the General Assembly Hall. Let me therefore just emphasize a few of the most important points it contains.

Croatia is pleased with the progress the Convention has made on the road to universalization. In our opinion, it has succeeded in creating a new international norm, even though not a small number of States, with hundreds of millions of landmines, remain beyond the reach of the Convention. As one of the original 40 countries whose signature and ratification brought the Ottawa Convention into force, Croatia is pleased that the rate of ratification has not slowed down. We welcome the 10 new countries that ratified the Convention in 2003.

On the substantive level, we believe that the extensive debate in recent months about the reform of the Convention is crucial to the future development of mine action in general, and to the Convention in particular. We welcome the ongoing consultations taking place concerning possible changes to the inner structure of the Convention, including regarding the number and duration of annual meetings of States parties and of intersessional meetings.

The progress made in fulfilling the four goals of the Ottawa Convention has been tangible but uneven. There have been marked advances in the destruction of mines stored in stockpiles and in mine clearance of national territories contaminated with mines. However, Croatia believes that assistance in the rehabilitation of mine victims needs more energy and engagement on the international level so that the timetables set by the Convention can actually be implemented. Furthermore, the fact that financial assistance to the victims of mines has remained constant over the previous two years, while the total number of those injured by anti-personnel mines has increased, is a cause for grave concern.

Croatia is determined to achieve all the goals of the Convention. In its new position as co-Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Victim Assistance and

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

03-60465 (E)

Socio-Economic Reintegration. Croatia wishes to reaffirm that all actors engaged in mine action share the responsibility to ensure all necessary support — institutional and financial, symbolic and substantive — for the full rehabilitation and reintegration of survivors of landmines.

On the national level, Croatia has experienced a 40 per cent decrease in the number of mine victims. While every mine victim is a tragedy, the fact that Croatia registered only six incidents this year is persuasive evidence of the success of the broad media campaign launched by the Government and of the rigorous marking and fencing of areas suspected of containing mines. In that regard, we are pleased to see the establishment of the South-East European Regional Centre for Psychosocial Rehabilitation, which is based in the town of Rovinj, Croatia. In addition to the relevant Croatian ministries and the county of Istria, funds have also been pledged by Canada, Norway, Japan and the United States Department of State, to whom we express our sincere gratitude.

Croatia is still a mine-affected State, although mine contamination is a gradually decreasing problem. We believe that through the joint efforts of government authorities and numerous hard-working personnel involved in mine action on the ground, as well as generous international assistance, Croatia should be free of mines by 2009. Under the leadership of the Croatian Mine Action Centre, approximately one quarter of the areas in Croatia suspected of containing mines had been cleared of mines by October 2003. In that endeavour, the great majority of funding — approximately 85 per cent — was secured by the Croatian Government. In addition, we have received valuable support and considerable financial assistance from numerous States, institutions, organizations and individuals.

Croatia particularly encourages the use of the matching-funds mechanism of the international Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Action — whose headquarters are in Ljubljana, Slovenia — with the continuous allocation of funds provided by the United States Government. As the third largest donor to the Trust Fund, we welcome its transparent, tailor-made and efficient operations. However, we have expressed dissatisfaction with the low inflow of donor contributions this year, which has resulted in an increased burden on the State budget. Stronger donor assistance would significantly contribute to the early completion of the mine clearance process in Croatia and help to free up the Government's resources, which are needed for activities conducive to economic development.

Croatia recognizes and values the importance of expert education and training for all persons engaged in mine clearance. Bearing that in mind, allow me to inform the Assembly that on 15 October 2003, the Mine Action Academy for international studies in humanitarian mine clearance was established at the Polytechnic College of Velika Gorica, a town near Zagreb.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate Croatia' s offer to host the first meeting of the States parties to the Ottawa Convention, directly following the 2004 Nairobi review conference. That will be a unique opportunity to organize for the first time a meeting of States parties in South-East Europe, a region still heavily contaminated with anti-personnel mines that has never had an opportunity to host such a conference.

Mr. Chaimongkol (Thailand): The current report card on the global effort to achieve the goal of a mine-free world shows mixed results. On the one hand, the report of the Secretary-General entitled "United Nations mine action: a strategy for 2001-2005" (A/58/260/Add.1) refers to significant progress since 1993 towards creating an environment free from the threat of landmines. The increase in the number of States parties to both the Mine Ban Convention and the Amended Protocol II of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons have resulted in a dramatic decline in the production, transfer, stockpiling and use of landmines.

On the other hand, the 2003 report of Landmine Monitor found that new landmine casualties have been reported in 65 countries — up from 61 countries listed in last year's document. The estimates are that there still are from 15,000 to 20,000 new casualties from landmines and unexploded ordnance each year, with 11,700 new casualties having been identified in 2002.

The fact remains that landmines continue to threaten human security in all regions of the world. In addition to the toll in human lives, landmines also pose obstacles to development and people-to-people contacts. The question is one of how we can most effectively meet the global challenge posed by landmines. The threat to human security posed by the landmines should be addressed in an integrated

manner, so as to take into account all aspects of the problem, namely, mine awareness, mine clearance, victim assistance, stockpile-destruction and universal adherence to the Mine Ban Convention.

Thailand certainly subscribes to the view that the problem posed by landmines can best be dealt with from the humanitarian perspective. The indiscriminate pain and suffering caused by landmines is universally recognized, as is the need to ameliorate such suffering through effective victim assistance and mine-removal programmes. We therefore welcome and support the emphasis on the humanitarian imperative as one of the key principles and core values of the revised United Nations mine action strategy for 2001-2005.

Meeting such immense humanitarian concerns, however, is a burden no one State or group of States can manage alone. International support and cooperation is therefore necessary to make substantive progress in solving the landmine problem, particularly in mine-affected developing States. Partnerships need to be created at all levels to enhance national, regional and global capacities to address this issue.

In September of this year, Thailand was honoured to host in Bangkok the fifth Meeting of States Parties to the Mine Ban Convention, the first Meeting to be held in Asia. Over 600 representatives of both States parties and non-State parties participated in the Meeting, many from countries that had never attended such meetings before. The Bangkok Declaration highlighted the serious threat posed by landmines to human security and its devastating humanitarian impacts. The Declaration adopted at the Meeting also called on States parties to pursue with renewed vigour efforts to clear mined areas, assist victims, destroy stockpiled mines and promote universal adherence to the Convention.

As a follow-up to the Meeting, Thailand introduced a draft resolution on the implementation of the Mine Ban Convention in the First Committee that was adopted by an overwhelming majority and that had a record number of 145 sponsors. As President of the fifth Meeting of States Parties, Thailand will continue to work closely with all concerned States until the First Review Conference is held, in November 2004, to make further progress towards the goals and objectives of the Mine Ban Convention.

For our part, we are making strenuous efforts to meet the obligations set out in the Mine Ban Convention. Earlier this year, Thailand was pleased to announce that it had completed the destruction of its stockpile of anti-personnel mines on 24 April. While that was a welcome achievement in itself, the major hurdle still lies ahead, namely, mine clearance on the ground.

Despite efforts by the Thailand Mine Action Centre, which is the national focal point for mine action, according to a level-one survey, only 0.87 square kilometres out of a total of 2,556.7 square kilometres — or 0.03 per cent of the mine-infested area — have been demined thus far. Much work remains ahead, and much assistance will therefore be required to complete that task by 2009, as required by the Convention.

As mine action is a complex and comprehensive undertaking, building partnerships at all levels is a must. Effective partnerships need to be fostered at the national level between all relevant stakeholders, including government agencies, civil society, the private sector and, of course, the victims and their families. For example, in Thailand the Mine Action Centre is working in partnership with all other relevant stakeholders, including such non-governmental organizations as the Thailand Campaign to Ban Landmines. Many activities, particularly in the promotion of public awareness, are spearheaded by local non-governmental organizations, with the support of the Government and local businesses. Partnerships among and between Governments, including both States parties and non-State parties to the Mine Ban Convention, as well as with international organizations, should be encouraged and pursued with equal vigour.

Again, with regard to Thailand's example, we enjoy very productive partnerships with Norway through the Norwegian People's Aid, the United Kingdom and the United States, in initiating the level one landmine impact survey. Thailand also enjoys a strong partnership with the United States, particularly with regard to training, equipment and general capacity-building for various mine action units. Furthermore, Thailand is also exploring partnerships with China in mine action. We also appreciate the assistance provided by the United Nations Development Programme, which is supported by Japan through the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Action. Thailand also wishes to register its appreciation to the United Nations Mine Action Service and all other United Nations agencies

involved in assistance in mine action throughout the world.

Thailand itself is providing assistance in mine action to other developing countries, in the spirit of South-South cooperation. Mine clearance instructors were provided to Sri Lanka to help train trainers. Thailand is also working with other countries, such as Slovakia, to explore the possibilities of promoting trilateral cooperation for the benefit of third countries. As a troop-contributing country to United Nations peacekeeping operations, Thailand also has provided mine action assistance through its troops to Cambodia and Timor-Leste.

Much of the assistance for mine action earmarked for mine-affected developing States comes from humanitarian assistance. The report of the Secretary-General on assistance in mine action (A/58/260) confirms that donors continue to fund mine action primarily from humanitarian or emergency budget lines. That approach should continue. There is a danger that if assistance in mine action is to be drawn from development assistance programmes, developing States may not always be willing to receive assistance in such form. That certainly would not help our cause of mobilizing all States, particularly mine-affected developing States in need of assistance, to undertake effective mine action on a sustained basis. It is therefore necessary to exercise prudence and to carefully examine the implications from all angles, taking into account the views of developing countries. Our initial view is that funds for mine action programmes should be provided over and above development assistance.

Finally, I would like to say a word on the United Nations revised mine action strategy for 2001-2005. We commend the Secretary-General for coming up with a revised strategy that takes into account the views of Member States on this important issue. Many of the key elements for effective mine action and assistance in mine action are reflected in the Secretary-General's report, which will help to guide our work during the several years ahead.

Mr. Zulu Kilo-Abi (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*spoke in French*): I am pleased, as we address agenda item 22, entitled "Assistance in mine action", to express, on behalf of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, our gratitude to the Secretary-General for his detailed report (A/58/260) on the subject of mine action and the progress achieved with regard to the six goals and strategic objectives of the United Nations mine action strategy.

As we all know, while being a global scourge and a danger that claims numerous innocent civilians — especially in rural areas — anti-personnel mines are above all an ongoing obstacle to the return of refugees and displaced persons to their homes, to humanitarian assistance operations, to reconstruction and economic development and to the re-establishment of normal social conditions. In short, due to the terror they inflict, anti-personnel mines prevent human beings from living normally and deprives them of any chance of benefiting from their land after a conflict.

Let us recall that the General Assembly, after acknowledging the scope of the harm caused to mankind by landmines and unexploded ordnance, requested all Member States and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations to undertake activities — in accordance with article 6 of, and in cooperation with States parties to, the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction — in the areas of raising public awareness about the danger posed by landmines, training, detection, mine clearance and assistance to victims. We should also recall that the Convention now enjoys the active support of 141 States. In that connection, the fifth Meeting of States Parties, which was held in Bangkok from 15 to 19 September, emphasized that, in order to achieve the ideal of a world free from landmines, States parties should respect their obligations vis-à-vis the destruction of all stockpiled mines, the clearance of mined areas and universal adherence to the Ottawa Convention. My delegation would now like to launch an urgent appeal to Member States that have not yet done so to do all they can to accede to the Mine Ban Convention as soon as possible.

As of 1 November 2002, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is a State party to the Ottawa Convention. On 30 April 2003, my country submitted its first report to the Secretary-General under article 7 of the Convention. We are now continuing to identify all of our stockpiled anti-personnel mines, with a view to their destruction, as well as the mined areas in the whole of our territory.

Although it is true that concrete progress has been made to date, it is also true that many challenges remain. In addressing those challenges, it should be recalled that for the Democratic Republic of the Congo it is important that there be collective awareness of the reality and scope of the problem posed by the increased existence of mines and unexploded ordnance on our territory.

As everyone is aware, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is emerging from a particularly difficult war that has lasted for over five years. That deadly war brought together numerous ruthless armies in the field and claimed 3.5 million lives. Although my country is not among the countries most affected by anti-personnel mines, we must nevertheless realize that while are is still incomplete, many people are injured and maimed as a result of accidents caused by landmines. That problem serves to impose an additional burden on the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, who have already been severely challenged by many years of war.

As the Secretary-General rightly pointed out in his report on special assistance for the economic recovery and reconstruction of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (A/58/273), given widespread poverty and an economy that has been bled dry, addressing financial needs is crucial to dealing with the issue of anti-personnel mines. At the moment, the real, most urgent needs include, first, legal assistance; secondly, the financial, technological, technical and human resources needed to draft and implement a mine action programme that establishes, among other things, priorities with regard to emergencies, medical care, physical rehabilitation through the use of prosthesis and social and psychological care for victims of mines and unexploded ordnance; thirdly, support for the preparation and execution of operations to destroy stockpiled anti-personnel mines; and, fourthly, the establishment and initial training of a national mine clearance capacity that can operate throughout the entire country.

As the President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo rightly stated before the General Assembly, given the many challenges we face in the post-conflict Democratic Republic of the Congo, it is crucial for the international community to be more involved in addressing all these concerns in the relevant provisions of the draft resolution being negotiated with regard to special assistance for the economic recovery and reconstruction of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Before concluding, my delegation would like to avail itself of the opportunity presented by this very important meeting to thank and congratulate the United Nations Mine Action Service for its remarkable mine action efforts, and in particular for its ongoing support for the Mine Action Centre in our country through the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. That support makes it possible for my country to properly control the problem of landmines. We also very much appreciate the assistance of those who provide funds and of governmental and non-governmental organizations. That assistance has made it possible to speed up the process of raising public awareness with regard to the issue of anti-personnel mines and unexploded ordnance, both in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and throughout the world.

In order to completely free the world from landmines, my country ardently wishes to see multilateral consensus develop in the framework of the Ottawa Convention with regard to the issue of mine action and ending the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of anti-personnel landmines.

Mr. Tekle (Eritrea): Allow me, at the outset, to express, on behalf of the delegation of Eritrea, our appreciation and gratitude to the Secretary-General for his report (A/589/260) on assistance in mine action. The Eritrean delegation considers that document to be comprehensive and balanced. It also brings into focus the dangers posed to all peoples by those infernal weapons.

It is sad to note that landmines and unexploded ordnance continue to be a major threat to the lives of millions in developing countries. The Horn of Africa is one of the most seriously affected regions in the world. In Eritrea almost 1,200 of its 3,461 communities — about one third of the country — is contaminated. The hardest hit are rural populations, pastoralists and internally displaced persons. Landmines and unexploded ordnance have also been a bane on the implementation of socio-economic development programmes.

Eritreans recognize, through the bitter experience of a 30-year-old liberation struggle, and two and a half years of defending the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of their country, that landmines are the source

of suffering and pain to many innocent civilians, especially the vulnerable members of society. The diverse, scarce resources from development activities constitute major threats to political stability and prevent the return of refugees and internally displaced persons to their homes to pursue their previous productive lives, especially in the rural areas.

During the first war of independence, more than 1 million landmines and unexploded ordnance were planted extensively in all the regions of the country, especially in rural farmlands, near sources of water and roadways. During the second war, the enemy planted even more landmines in two and a half years than during the 30-years war in a much smaller area, thus adding to Eritrea's immense landmine problems. To date, there are an estimated 1.5 million to 1.6 million mines, and about 300,000 unexploded landmines in the country. In a country with a population of 3.6 million, it means there is one landmine for every three persons.

Since 1973, between 50,000 and 80,000 people have been victims of these weapons, more than 2,000 have suffered between 1991 and 1993, while police authorities have registered about 500 victims between 1994 and 1999. The problem was compounded by the absence of information. If the occupation forces left no maps after their defeat, the latest aggressor refused for a long time to make the maps in its possession available to the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE), as required by the Algiers peace agreements. When it finally did submit maps, they were functionally useless. Most of the new landmines and minefields are located near population areas. This is creating serious problems and routinely inflicting casualties on people and animals alike. The continued travails of the landmines and unexploded ordnance, coupled with Ethiopia's lack of cooperation with the Boundary Commission and culminating in its repudiation of the peace agreements, is subverting all diplomatic efforts being made to ensure a successful execution of the peace agreements, to establish peaceful relations between the two countries and to create the first essential steps for regional peace.

Eritrea is committed to the total elimination of anti-personnel mines and unexploded ordnance because it is convinced that it is an essential measure that must be taken to ensure the return to normalcy in the lives of our people and the people of the region. To this end, it endorses the international objective of a year of victims, and is prepared to join all international and regional efforts that help in the removal of the threat caused by these infernal weapons.

Eritrea acceded to the anti-mine Convention only recently. Yet, being aware of the devastating effects of these evil weapons, it had, even during the liberation struggle and long before the adoption of the Convention, unilaterally practised the self-restraint measures being advocated by the Convention and other instruments. This can be confirmed by many non-governmental organizations that had visited the liberated areas during the first war. In any case, Eritrea has consistently voted for all anti-mine resolutions, including General Assembly resolution 54/54 B of December 1999. Eritrea also acknowledges the importance of international and regional coordination in mine-clearing activities without, however, impinging on the decision-making powers of the Eritrean Government. It, therefore, finds no problem in endorsing not only the provisions of the Ottawa Convention, but also the principles, objectives, programme function, standards and criteria set up by several follow-up meetings to the Ottawa Conference.

Eritrea embarked on a mine-clearing mission immediately after its liberation in 1991, that is, two years before its official recognition as a sovereign State. In 1996, the Government established a national mine clearance centre operated by the Minister of Defence, and consisting of a command unit, a historical research department, a mine clearance training centre and one company of mine clearance personnel consisting of 80 persons. The task was challenging and dangerous for a new country, while resources were scant. It was also time-consuming and very expensive, yet the operation was going smoothly until the new Ethiopian aggression in 1998. Engineers of the Eritrean Peoples Liberation Army cleared an estimated 450,000 anti-personnel and 15,000 anti-tank mines after liberation in 1991. The mine clearance centre received expert assistance from a United States mine action training team which helped it to plan, organize, train and resource its humanitarian mine clearance operations, and more particularly, to develop a meaningful infrastructure capable of succeeding on its own. The United States military bilateral agreement ended in 1998.

True to its hallowed tradition of self-reliance, Eritrea has also adopted a policy of ownership that would empower its agents to play the primary role in the planning and implementation of programmes, and

allow foreign donors to assist in the creation of structures which underline the importance of capacity-building. However, contamination has been immensely exacerbated during the Ethiopian aggression, and today there exists in Eritrea more than 1.6 million landmines and unexploded ordnance.

After the signing of the Algiers Agreements, the Eritrean Government established the Eritrean Demining Commission for the purpose of coordinating mine clearance operations with UNMEE. The Eritrean Mining Action Programme, which was, in turn, succeeded in 2002 by the Eritrean Demining Authority (EDA) to meet the needs of the times. The objectives of the EDA for the period 2003 to 2007 are to eliminate the strength of mines and unexploded ordnance, facilitate the return of internally displaced persons to their villages, ensure safe use of land and conduct other development activities.

To this end, EDA activities have included, inter alia, evolving a national mine action strategy plan on the basis of a landmine impact survey, establishing the legal and institutional framework for the participation of national and international non-governmental organizations, and overseeing the strict observance and implementation of the Ottawa Convention. Work is progressing well, and the targets set for 2003 to 2007 are on course. In this connection, I wish to acknowledge with thanks the role being played by UNMEE in mine-clearing activities in Eritrea.

Eritrea is convinced that the struggle for the total elimination of landmines and unexploded ordnance must also be waged at the regional level to achieve any credible results. The Horn of Africa is heavily infested by landmines, and only a concerted effort by the countries of the region will achieve any meaningful success. Eritrea is committed to the creation of a landmine-free zone in the Horn of Africa and shall spare no effort towards the achievement, through EDA or any other mechanism, of a zero-victim status for the region within a mutually agreed time frame. Yet, this is predicated on the achievement of peace between Eritrea and Ethiopia, and that seems to be in doubt since Ethiopia has rejected the Algiers Agreements and the final and binding decision of the Boundary Commission.

I would like to conclude by stressing the following. First, we must always remember that landmines are about human beings, individuals as well as communities, and affect them in the most direct manner — their livelihood. Secondly, without any exaggeration, international cooperation, coordination and assistance are essential to meaningfully alleviate human suffering. Thirdly, it has become increasingly evident that not all of the parties that have acceded to the Convention have been observing its provisions in good faith.

Experience has taught us that the signing of conventions and the adoption of binding resolutions have no meaning at all to lawless States who do not believe in the principle of pacta sunt servanda and have been, in characteristic fashion, systematically and cynically violating the Convention, thus endangering the stability of those law-abiding States — which have been scrupulously observing and implementing its provisions — and the welfare of their populations. Such subversive acts cause a serious threat to the continued validity of the Convention.

The international community has the duty to condemn those countries, including Ethiopia, which continue to recklessly violate the Convention and the rule of law before it becomes too late to rescue the Convention. No amount of naming and shaming will deter them from their systematic violation of conventions with wilful abandon. We are convinced that only by means of credible searches, with strict enforcement measures — the sine qua non of the Ottawa Convention — can the noble principles of the Convention be upheld. Fourthly, it is recognized that, even under the best of circumstances, the elimination of landmines and unexploded ordnance will be a daunting task. In circumstances where Ethiopia is planting new mines — even at the Eritrean Demining Agency — removing them has been extremely difficult. Yet, we are confident that we shall overcome our difficulties by 2007.

Mr. Mpundu (Zambia): I take the floor to express Zambia's commitment to the universalization of the two international Conventions that prohibit the use of mines. These are the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction (the Ottawa Convention) and the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May be Deemed to be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects (Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons).

This debate, coming after the fifth Meeting of States Parties to the Ottawa Convention, held from 15 to 19 September, in Bangkok, is timely. It affords the United Nations and the international community, other international organizations and non-governmental organizations an opportunity to coordinate their efforts in mine action.

My delegation is grateful to Secretary-General Kofi Annan for his report contained in document A/57/430, which is an excellent catalogue of activities undertaken by the international community in mine action. The report contains information with regard to the inter-agency approach by the United Nations in addressing strategies to mobilize both material and financial resources for mine action. Prominent among these efforts is the implementation of the mine-action strategy for the period 2001 to 2005. My delegation welcomes consultations made by the Secretary-General with Member States on the best way to implement this strategy.

While welcoming the positive response by the international community in support of mine action, my delegation would like to see more improvements in cooperation and coordination of programmes. Civil-military cooperation at the local level should be encouraged and supported. In many countries mine-action centres, while retaining civilian leadership, have drawn experts from the military to undertake humanitarian mine clearance. In order to make optimum use of available human resources, my delegation advocates investing in civil-military institutions to strengthen local capacity-building. Zambia hopes the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining will soon define the appropriate role of the military in mine action.

In order to ensure success in implementing the Mine Action Strategy for the period 2001-2005, Zambia wishes to appeal to the United Nations to emphasize stronger cooperation and coordination of efforts at the regional and subregional levels. Accordingly, my delegation wishes to state that in order to be effective, efforts must be integrated and prioritized. Mine action strategies and activities should be designed and implemented in the broader context of humanitarian and development support. In other words, the development imperatives should be included alongside the humanitarian imperatives.

In recognition of the development imperatives, the Zambian Government has, since 2001, addressed aspects of socio-economic impact of landmines on society. The Zambia Mine Action Centre, with the support of the Government of the United States of America, has designed and is implementing programmes in this regard. Since 2002, the Centre has cleared mines from areas earmarked for a large World Bank-funded project known as the Gweembe-Tonga Development Project, located in the lower Zambezi valley. When completed, the project will alleviate poverty among the people who were displaced by the construction of the Kariba power project in 1956. This is how the mine action strategy can effectively serve the development imperative.

Zambia wishes to take this opportunity to commend the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) for its excellent efforts in coordinating mine action activities. The organization of inter-agency assessment visits to mine-affected countries should be supported. Their visits have a confidence-building character that encourages cooperating partners to commit resources in support of mine action.

My delegation wishes to appeal for extra funds in support of UNMAS's efforts in this regard. As a result, of an inter-agency visit to Zambia, coordinated by UNMAS in 2001, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Development Programme and the International Committee of the Red Cross have supported the Zambia Mine Action Centre programmes. This is a commendable effort that my Government would like to continue in the years to come.

My delegation wishes to request UNMAS to coordinate another inter-agency visit to Zambia early in 2004, to assess the progress made by the Zambia Mine Action Centre since their last visit in May 2001. My Government wishes in particular to be supported in the destruction of recovered anti-personnel mines.

The Zambia Mine Action Centre requires assistance in the training needs of staff. The management of mine-action centres requires not only good and adequate equipment, but also a well-trained staff. The Zambian Government wishes to take this opportunity to express its appreciation for the support received thus far from the Government of the United States of America. With the support of the Government

of the United States of America, Zambia established and staffed a Mine Action Centre. In spite of these achievements in demining efforts, Zambia requires further support.

As part of Zambia's mine-action strategy, my delegation appeals for the strengthening of the mine-action machinery. In this regard, Zambia welcomes the fact that 141 countries have become States parties to the anti-personnel landmines Convention. That is an encouraging development. Zambia is one of over 110 States that do not have stockpiled anti-personnel mines. I hope that the number of possessors that have completed stockpile destruction will keep on growing each year. Given the successes recorded in recent years in mine action, Zambia hopes that many countries will be declared landmine-free before the end of the mine-action strategy for 2001-2005.

As it has in previous sessions, my delegation shall once again vote in favour of the draft resolution on this item.

Mr. Zenna (Ethiopia): With more than 100 million landmines planted worldwide, the global landmine crisis has become one of the major factors for human insecurity. Landmines inflict physical and emotional injuries and the families and communities of their victims are plagued by psychological and economic burdens. The problem continues to be a serious obstacle to socio-economic progress. Africa, owing to past and ongoing conflicts that have left millions of landmines, is one of the most heavily mined regions of the globe.

Ethiopia is one of the countries most affected by landmines. Unfortunately, the country was immersed in internal and external wars in the 1930s, 1980s and 1990s and, most recently, the war with Eritrea between 1998 and 2000, which led to the contamination of large areas of the country from landmines and unexploded ordnance. According to the Ethiopian Mine Action Office (EMAO), there are over 2 million landmines all over the country. Because of landmines and unexploded ordnance, vast tracts of land that are the bases of livelihood of thousands of people — particularly in the northern, eastern and south-eastern regions of the country — have become inaccessible to farmers and pastoralists alike. Moreover, this problem has made the return of refugees and the rehabilitation of internally displaced persons a daunting task. On the basis of the reports from EMAO, there have been some 637 deaths and injuries from landmines and unexploded ordnance.

The Government of Ethiopia has accorded mine action great significance. As a first step, a humanitarian mine-action body, the Ethiopian Mine Action Office, was established in February 2001. So far, with the resources committed from the Government budget, assistance from donors and technical assistance from the United Nations system — specifically the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Children's Fund — a number of practical mine-action activities have been undertaken in the past few years.

Among the most important accomplishments are the development of a management centre, primarily organizing EMAO and training local staff, and the engagement of international advisers; the equipping and training of four companies of civilian deminers; the development of field capacity and the commencement of demining in May 2002; and the launching of a landmine-impact survey. In view of its importance as a basis for designing a 20-year plan to make the country free of landmines and unexploded ordnance, the early completion of the ongoing landmine-impact survey is one of the top priorities of our mine-action programmes. The survey, which is being conducted by Norwegian Peoples Aid, with assistance from the Survey Action Centre and a start-up fund from several donors, is expected to be completed this year. However, its completion is conditional on the availability of additional outside funding assistance in order to make up the shortfall.

Furthermore, the Government of Ethiopia attaches great importance to enhancing the capacity of EMAO. In effect, it has allocated a budget of close to $3 million for the purpose of mechanizing the works of the Office.

The magnitude of mine contamination and its socio-economic impact puts Ethiopia among the countries that require close attention. The current humanitarian mine-action capacity is still in its initial stage. A substantial amount of resources is needed to sustain the various ongoing projects and to make progress in expanding mine-action activities in the country. Accordingly, we call upon donors and concerned international organizations to enhance their assistance and cooperation, particularly in equipping, training and deploying additional companies of

deminers; establishing rapid response teams; assisting in the timely completion of the landmine-impact survey; creating mine-awareness and victim assistance programmes; and providing technical training and financial assistance to enhance the capacity of EMAO.

Finally, we believe that the mobilization of States, civil societies and governmental and non-governmental organizations plays a critical role in the eradication of landmines and unexploded ordnance and in dealing with their socio-economic and political consequences.

Ethiopia remains committed to this noble cause and will continue to make its own contribution to this collective endeavour. At the same time, we have been beneficiaries of the global collective efforts in our task of addressing the severe landmine problem in our country and we wish to thank all donor countries, international organizations and concerned non-governmental organizations for their invaluable assistance and cooperation.

Mr. Saeed (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, allow me on behalf of my delegation to thank the Secretary-General for his report under agenda item 22 on assistance in mine action and for his efforts to act on the six goals enumerated in the United Nations mine-action strategy for the period 2001-2005.

We also offer particular thanks to the assessment and field missions to my country and all those affected by mines, as well as to all the international and regional organizations, institutions and non-governmental organizations active in this field.

Sudan is now a full-fledged partner in international efforts to combat landmines, particularly anti-personnel mines. It is one of the first countries to sign the Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, and it formally ratified the Convention in October, following the high-level Bangkok Conference held in September of this year. We have taken these measures because we are keenly aware of the seriousness of the harm done to humans because of such mines. Mines cause permanent, disabling injuries and disfigurement of civilians, especially children, who are disproportionately affected. This is in addition to mines placing major obstacles on the road to construction and economic development and obstructing projects of demobilization, reintegration and resettling in many countries for many years to come, especially countries that are undergoing transition from war to peace. It is for those reasons that Sudan has voted in the First Committee in support of all resolutions on the implementation of the Ottawa Convention. Moreover, we wish to declare our full support for all similar resolutions, as we are convinced that anti-mine action can only be successful if there is multilateral regional and international coordination and cooperation.

Nationally, we have been pursuing ongoing efforts through a Sudanese mine action campaign, in collaboration with of the United Nations Mine Action Service programme. The work of this programme is carried out within the framework of the office of the Sudanese commissioner for humanitarian aid and the Sudanese civil engineering unit with a view to establishing a national centre for mine action. Such a centre would contain a databank and a specialized cartographic agency. We have established training programmes in the anti-mine action field and are carrying out cooperative efforts with the European Union, as well as with a number of other national and international organizations. Finally, in partnership with the United Nations Children's Fund, we are working to make the public aware of the dangers of mines.

The problems posed by landmines and unexploded ordnance have for some time now been an obstacle in our national reconstruction and development efforts. Nevertheless, Sudan is now on the point of signing a comprehensive peace agreement that will turn the page on that part of our history and make it possible for us to step up our efforts to combat mines. Our work in the Nubian mountain region, undertaken in cooperation with the United Nations and the European Union, has made it possible for many of our citizens to return to their villages and resume their agricultural activities. That, of course, gives us a great deal of hope. For that reason, we attach great importance to the implementation of the United Nations mine action strategy and are eager to cooperate with any and all parties concerned.

In conclusion, I should like to thank the United Nations for its efforts and its programme, from which we have benefited and which have helped the Sudanese mine action campaign in its work. We would also like to reiterate the importance of the technical assistance rendered to mine-affected developing countries in helping them to elaborate effective national programmes, leading to the complete elimination of

mines. We would like to call upon all those who have not yet done so to ratify the Ottawa Convention, thus lending their support to the choice already made by the majority of the family of nations for a better, mine-free world.

Mr. Kittikhoun (Lao People's Democratic Republic): First, I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his report on assistance in mine action (A/58/260), which allows us to take stock of where we are now, review what has already been accomplished and consider proposals for future measures in this area.

Laos continues to suffer the consequences of the heaviest bombardment in history, which occurred over the course of a very long and protracted war. During the period from 1963 to 1972, 2 million tons of cluster bombs were dropped. Fifteen of our 18 provinces were affected and more than 50 per cent of our total landmass is contaminated. Those "bomblets" can be found anywhere in Laos — in towns, villages, schools, hills — anywhere. To deal with the problem, the Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic has established a trust fund on unexploded ordnance. The objective of the fund is fourfold: first, to raise the awareness of our population to the danger; secondly, to clear the contaminated land; thirdly, to undertake a survey of the affected areas; and lastly, but not least, to train our nationals to work in this field. We have logged some major achievements already: approximately 25 square kilometres have been cleared; we have raised the awareness of approximately 1 million inhabitants to the existing danger; and, most importantly, we have been able to train some 1,000 nationals in mine-clearance work.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all our friends in the donor community — the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund, the European Union, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, France, the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Finland, Belgium, Luxembourg, Italy and the Republic of Korea — for their financial contributions to our trust fund.

This assistance is not only humanitarian assistance. It is also development assistance. It is about the issue of development. It is about poverty eradication and sustainable development. If the idea is to help our country reduce or eradicate poverty, we think that the Lao People's Democratic Republic deserves to be assisted in the field.

As I said, a lot has been achieved, but, of course, much remains to be done. It is our fervent hope that the international community, and particularly our donor friends, will continue to help us as the Lao People's Democratic Republic endeavours to cope with this unexploded ordnance problem and help us move ahead in our developmental efforts.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item. Two representatives have requested to exercise the right of reply. May I remind members that statements in the exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and to 5 minutes for the second intervention, and should be made by delegates from their seats.

Mr. Zenna (Ethiopia): I apologize for taking the floor, but I am forced to because of the Eritrean intervention.

It is a surprise for me to hear from a representative of a country that managed to go to war with all its neighbours in its short life of independence accusing Ethiopia of aggression. We all know, and it was clear from the very beginning, that the war with Eritrea in 1998 was triggered by the invasion of Eritrean forces; that was confirmed and investigated by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1998. The OAU report and investigation clearly stated that Eritrea was the aggressor and the invader. But the Eritrean style of typically hiding naked aggression is not new to our delegation.

We have also been accused by Eritrea of violating an anti-mine convention. Maybe it means the Ottawa Convention. That is also a surprise, because Ethiopia, as a founding Member of the United Nations with an unimpeachable record of respecting international law — including treaties and conventions to which it is a party or to which it is a signatory — has never violated any convention or treaty and has never been accused of doing so by any relevant organization. But the Eritrean delegation has accused Ethiopia of violating the anti-mine Convention.

Eritrea has also accused Ethiopia of planting new mines in Eritrea. That is also a naked lie. Such accusations, coming as they do from the Eritrean side, prove that nothing other than lies can be expected from this delegation.

Mr. Tekle (Eritrea): We have just heard the Ethiopian representative on the question of aggression, on the question of pacta sunt servanda and the question of landmines. If I had the time, I would reply to the question of aggression, which we addressed in the plenary during the general debate and in the First Committee — both very appropriate forums.

But right now let me begin by addressing the issue of landmines. As usual, I will make references to third-party documents, including the report of the Secretary-General. If that report was a lie, so be it. In the first place, the Ethiopian Government has been, throughout the past six years, of course, inundating meetings with unverifiable allegations every time the Eritrean Government produced third-party documents. The objective is to create enough confusion and doubt to ensure that a frustrated and uncaring world will declare a plague on both houses. Unfortunately, that tactic may have worked. I shall not dwell on Ethiopia's violation in detail. I will refer only to the report of the Secretary-General and to one newspaper account.

In 1999 Steven Edwards wrote in *The National Post* of 21 April 1999, identifying only three countries that have been witnessed planting new mines in conflict areas. Among the three identified is Ethiopia. That establishes the fact.

As to the cooperation with the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea and the fulfilment of its obligations, I would like to quote the Secretary-General's report of 8 March 2002 (S/2002/245). On page 4, there is reference to mine actions. In paragraph 19, it refers to Eritrea:

> "Currently, more than 1,100 Eritrean mine action personnel work in the Temporary Security Zone; they are organized in 18 manual clearance groups, six mechanical clearance teams, six explosive ordnance disposal and survey units, 13 mine risk education teams, three survey and marking teams, and two explosive detection dog units."

Regarding the Ethiopian side, paragraph 22 of the same section states the following:

> "As you will recall from my last progress report, a series of meetings at the Ethiopian Ministry of Defence in October had resulted in the exchange of vital Ethiopian mine-related information. Having studied that information, UNMEE is seeking further clarification from the Ethiopian authorities on the types of mines used in the Temporary Security Zone and the adjacent areas, as well as more specific information on minefields already cleared by the Ethiopian Armed Forces. Delivery of this information has been promised in the near future and is eagerly awaited."

If members recall my statement, I said that, at first, Ethiopia refused to provide those maps, and when it did, they were found to be functionally useless. That is what paragraph 22 refers to.

The Ethiopian representative also talks about Ethiopia adhering scrupulously to all agreements it has signed. It has been only three weeks since the Ethiopian Government rejected the Algiers Agreement in a letter dated 19 September from its Prime Minister. The President of the Security Council responded in a letter to the Prime Minister. Permit me to quote extensively from that letter:

> "... the members of the Security Council steadfastly support the completion of the peace process and the full and expeditious implementation of the Algiers Agreement. ... Only the full implementation of the Algiers Agreement will lead to sustainable peace.
>
> "The members of the Security Council wish to convey to you their deep regret at the intention of the Government of Ethiopia not to accept the entirety of the delimitation and demarcation decision as decided by the Boundary Commission. ...
>
> "The members of the Security Council, therefore, call upon the Government of Ethiopia to provide its full and prompt cooperation to the Boundary Commission and its field officers. ...
>
> "Finally, I have been asked by the members of the Security Council to remind Ethiopia of the obligations of both parties ... to bring the peace process to a successful conclusion."

How much clearer could the letter be about violations?

The question of aggression has been addressed several times. The aggression issue revolves around the village of Badme, which was the flashpoint. The Boundary Commission has decided that Badme is entirely on Eritrea sovereign territory. The question

that we must ask, then, is: where is Badme? In the answer, one will find the definitions of aggression and aggressor, of who the aggressor is and who the victim of aggression is.

The President: I now call on the representative of Ethiopia, who wishes to speak a second time in exercise of the right of reply. The intervention is limited to five minutes.

Mr. Zenna (Ethiopia): With regard to the Boundary Commission's decision, Ethiopia is committed to the Algiers Agreement. We have never retreated from that position. We are in agreement with the Algiers Agreement. What happened with the Boundary Commission was clear, and we have already written our reply to the relevant United Nations authorities and other guarantors of that peaceful solution. Therefore, this issue is now in the hands of those who can consider it further. To Ethiopia, however, the Boundary Commission and the Algiers Agreement are now two different things. The Algiers Agreement states that it is the road for us to follow, but the Boundary Commission's decision is not consistent with the Algiers Agreement. That is our argument, and it is stated clearly in our reply to the authorities.

The President: I now call on the representative of Eritrea, who wishes to speak for a second and final time in exercise of the right of reply. The intervention is limited to five minutes.

Mr. Tekle (Eritrea): I shall be brief. This is stupefying. We are now told that

The President: I ask that appropriate use of language be observed; there is no place in our discussion for the word "stupid" or "stupefying".

Mr. Tekle (Eritrea): I did not say "stupid", Sir. I am sorry. What I was saying was that it is amazing — if you want me to change the word — that one is now dissociating the Boundary Commission — which is the central institution of the Algiers Agreement and is mandated by the Security Council to reach a final and binding decision — from the Algiers Agreement, in which case the principle of pacta sunt servanda would have no place.

The President: The Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 22.

Before adjourning the meeting, I should like to announce that, owing to the lateness of the hour, the General Assembly will resume its consideration of agenda item 20, "Support by the United Nations system of the efforts of Governments to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies", on Monday, 10 November 2003, in the morning, as the first item; as the second item, the third report of the General Committee (A/58/250/Add.2); as the third item, agenda item 36, "Declaration of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity on the aerial and naval military attack against the Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya by the present United States Administration in April 1986"; as the fourth item, a joint debate on agenda items 25, "University for Peace", and 44, "Culture of peace"; as the fifth item, agenda item 16 (b), "Election of twenty-nine members of the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme; and, as the sixth item, agenda item 42, "Follow-up to the United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage", to take action on draft resolution A/58/L.11.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.